Success for a Program to Help Get People With Hep C Into Care

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A program to screen people in Philadelphia for hepatitis C virus (HCV) and get those who test positive into specialty medical care proved successful. Publishing their findings in the Journal of General Internal Medicine, researchers recruited residents in a medically underserved Philadelphia neighborhood with a high hep C prevalence and referred them for hep C testing. Those who tested positive were then aided by individuals trained to help them navigate the health care system, including providing help with enrolling in insurance and procuring a referral from a primary care physician to an infectious disease specialist for the purpose of treating the virus.

A total of 1,301 individuals were tested for the virus, of whom 2.8 percent were living with hep C. Half of those who tested positive already knew they had the virus but were not in medical care, and the other half was unaware of their status.

The researchers found that the biggest obstacle to getting into specialty care was obtaining referrals for such physicians. The program was able to secure referrals for 64 percent of the HCV-positive participants. Most of them have stayed in care since being referred and several have started treatment for hep C.

“New testing technologies, coupled with new medications that can cure HCV, provide overwhelming opportunity to cure millions of Americans living with HCV, many of whom don’t even know they are infected,” study senior co-author Amy Nunn, ScD, MS, an assistant professor of behavioral and social sciences in the Brown University School of Public Health, said in a press release. “Our paper proves that scaling screening and treatment, even in neighborhoods with the highest rates of infection, is possible. We overcame all the commonly cited obstacles in this high-risk population.”

To read the abstract, click here.

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